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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006016

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2021

TAGS: PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: KURDISH LANGUAGE BROADCAST IN TURKEY STILL FACE  
RED TAPE FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Classified By: ADANA PRINCIPAL OFFICER ERIC GREEN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B),  
(D)

¶1. (U) This is a Consulate Adana Cable.

Summary

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¶2. (C) Despite liberalization moves earlier this year, the GOT's regulatory policy towards Kurdish language broadcasting seems aimed at stymieing efforts with red tape, perhaps in hopes that media companies will give up due to the extra expense and headaches involved. One young media entrepreneur in Diyarbakir is determined to play by the rules while challenging the GOT in court to relax the regulations' interpretation of the new law permitting non-Turkish broadcasts. Many observers -- including the Diyarbakir governor -- believe restrictions on indigenous broadcasts are illogical since most Kurdish homes in SE Turkey use satellite dishes to watch Denmark-based and PKK-affiliated Roj-TV. End summary.

Restrictions Still Hinder Kurdish Broadcasting

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¶3. (C) Adana PO met on September 26 with Cemal Dogan, the director of Diyarbakir's Gun ("Day") TV and radio station, which has pioneered Kurdish language broadcasting since the restrictions were relaxed in March. Dogan reported that the government still limits Kurdish language shows to 45 minutes per day and requires such broadcasts to include Turkish subtitles. Moreover, Gun is required to send transcripts of the shows to RTUK (the Turkish broadcast authority) in advance for approval before it can broadcast them. These restrictions mean that a 45-minute program can take his staff up to 20 hours to produce. It is obviously impossible, he noted, to do live broadcasts or news programming.

¶4. (C) Dogan said that these restrictions are the product of implementing regulations drafted following the legislative change permitting broadcasting. He said that, based on an examination of the notations and paperwork accompanying Gun's applications, it is clear to him that decisions about these issues are made at high levels of the GOT and that the military is involved. Gun, Dogan said, is appealing to the judiciary to have the rules changed to better reflect the new legislation.

¶ 5. (U) The state-owned broadcasting company, TRT, has also started broadcasting in Kurdish twice per week (once each in Kurmanji and Zaza dialects). These broadcasts do not include subtitles and, according to Dogan, they are not vetted by the RTUK.

What Do People Actually Watch?

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¶ 6. (U) People in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, meanwhile, use satellite dishes to receive Denmark-based and PKK-affiliated Roj-TV as well as Iraq-based Kurdish stations. Dogan said that many Diyarbakir residents watch the nightly news on Roj (in Kurdish) then on Gun (in Turkish) back-to-back. (In Adana, PO's standard-issue cable package from Turkey's main provider, DigiTurk, has Roj-TV as one of the hundreds of channels on offer.) Dogan noted that expanding locally produced Kurdish broadcasting would create competition for the foreign stations and give the GOT much more leverage on the content.

¶ 7. (C) In a subsequent meeting, Diyarbakir governor Efkan Ala acknowledged that there is no logic to the GOT policy, which basically leaves the field of Kurdish broadcasts open to Roj and the foreign networks. He said that a free-market approach would work best: let private companies broadcast in Kurdish as much as they want and the market will show in what language people want to receive their information. He predicted that the demand for Kurdish content would end up being rather modest.

Comment

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¶ 8. (C) GOT policy appears based on the out-dated idea that it is possible for a government to control what sources its citizens use to access information and to "protect" them from offensive content. In reality, Kurds in SE Turkey routinely watch Roj-TV, which is also available on the web for those with a high-speed internet connection. Governor Ala's candor about GOT policies may signal a reassessment, which could lead to fewer restrictions on Kurdish broadcasts. But as with most policies affecting the Kurdish issue, the military also may play a role that makes a coordinated approach even more difficult to achieve.

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